

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6951
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 7942

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, VM, ASEAN
SUBJECT: PHAN HIEN VISIT TO MALAYSIA

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 7623

1. SUMMARY: DISCUSSIONS DURING SRV DEPUTY FOREIGN
MINISTER PHAN HIEN'S JULY 23-24 VISIT TO MALAYSIA
FOCUSSED LARGELY ON A "ZONE OF PEACE" FOR SOUTHEAST
ASIA. NEITHER SIDE WENT INTO DETAIL ON THE SUBJECT,
HOWEVER, AND HIEN 'S PROPOSAL FOR A SPECIAL GOM MISSION
TO HANOI FOR NEGOTIATIONS ON SUCH A ZONE WAS SIDESTEPED
BY THE MALSYIANS, WHO PROPOSED LOWER-KEY TALKS THROUGH
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NORMAL DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS. HIEN INDICATED HIS APPROACH
ON THE "ZONE OF PEACE" WAS A STRICTLY BILATERAL ONE
WITH THE MALAYSIANS AND NOT INTENDED TO ENGAGE ASEAN
AS A WHOLE AT THIS STAGE. THE MALAYSIANS NEVERTHELESS
MADE CLEAR THEIR INTENTION TO KEEP FULLY IN STEP
WITH THEIR ASEAN COLLEAGUES THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS. US-
SRV RELATIONS AND REFUGEES WERE NOT DISCUSSED IN ANY

DETAIL. THE MALAYSIANS WELCOME THE OPPORTUNITY TO CARRY THEIR DIALOGUE FURTHER WITH HANOI BUT REMAIN SUSPICIOUS OF SRV INTENTIONS AND DID NOT ALLOW HIEN TO PUSH THEM ANY FASTER THAN THE MEASURED PACE THEY BELIEVE THE SITUATION PRESENTLY WARRANTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ACCORDING TO VARIOUS GOM AND OTHER CONTACTS HERE, HIEN USED THE VISIT TO KUALA LUMPUR TO FOCUS ON THE SRV'S RELATIONS WITH ASEAN AND PARTICULARLY ON THE CONCEPT OF A "ZONE OF PEACE" FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA. HIEN REITERATED THAT HANOI WISHES GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL OF THE ASEAN COUNTRIES AND NOW RECOGNIZES THAT ASEAN IS NOT AN ORGANIZATION AIMED AT THE SRV EITHER MILITARILY OR POLITICALLY.

3. HIEN SAID THE SRV WAS INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING A COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE "ZONE OF PEACE, FREEDOM AND NEUTRALITY" (ZOPFAN) WHICH MALAYSIA HAD ORIGINATED AND WHICH ASEAN HAD ADOPTED, AND THE VIETNAMESE IDEA OF "PEACE, INDEPENDENCE AND GENUINE NEUTRALITY". HE INDICATED THAT THE DIFFERENCES IN WORDING COULD BE NEGOTIATED AND THAT THERE WERE NO INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS BETWEEN THEM. WHEN THE MALAYSIANS ASKED SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE TERM "GENUINE INDEPENDENCE", WHICH HANOI HAD PREVIOUSLY USED IN CONNECTION WITH ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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OWN PROPOSAL, HIEN INSISTED THAT HE HAD NOT USED THAT PHRASE, THAT IT HAD BEEN A MISTRANSLATION. ACCORDING TO GOM OFFICIALS, THE VIETNAMESE SEEM MORE INTERESTED IN "GENUINE NEUTRALITY" AT THIS TIME.

4. HIEN PROPOSED THAT THE GOM SEND A DELEGATION TO HANOI TO NEGOTIATE ON THE "ZONE OF PEACE" ISSUE. HIEN MADE CLEAR THAT SUCH DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE ON A BILATERAL BASIS WITH MALAYSIA RATHER THAN WITH MALAYSIA AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF ASEAN. HE SAID THE SRV WAS INTERESTED IN SUCH DISCUSSIONS WITH MALAYSIA FIRST, AFTER WHICH MALAYSIA COULD CARRY ON THE TALKS PRESUMABLY WITH ITS ASEAN COLLEAGUES AND IN OTHER INTERNATIONAL FORUMS. (THE SRV AMBASSADOR HERE CONFIRMED TO AMBASSADOR JULY 31 THAT THE DISCUSSIONS WERE ON A STRICTLY BILATERAL BASIS, AND THAT THEY WERE ONLY GENERAL IN NATURE).

5. THE MALAYSIANS RESPONDED THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE "ZONE OF PEACE" CONCEPT FURTHER TO FIND ANY AREAS OF AGREEMENT BUT THAT THE MALAYSIAN AMBASSADOR IN HANOI COULD HANDLE THE NEGOTIATIONS

FOR THE TIME BEING. IF THESE PRELIMINARY TALKS
PROVE FRUITFUL, THEN THE GOM WOULD CONSIDER
SENDING A DELEGATION TO HANOI. THEY AGREED WITH
HIEN THAT SUCH TALKS WOULD BE ON A BILATERAL BASIS
AND THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE SPEAKING FOR ASEAN, BUT
MADE CLEAR THAT THEY WOULD BE CONSULTING CLOSELY WITH
THE OTHER ASEAN COUNTRIES ON ALL ASPECTS OF THEIR
DEALINGS WITH HIEN AND SUBSEQUENTLY WITH HANOI.

6. DURING THE VISIT HIEN ALSO EXPLAINED HANOI'S
POSITION CONCERNING ITS CONFLICTS WITH CHINA AND
CAMBODIA, MAKING THE POINT THAT VIETNAM ACES A MASSIVE
JOB OF RECONSTRCTIION AND HAD NO WISH TO PROVOKE
DISPUTES WITH EITHER NEIGHBOR. HE CLAIMED THE
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FAULT THEREFORE LAY ENTIRELY WITH CHINA AND CAMBODIA.
THE MALAYSIANS EXPRESSED HOPE FOR AN EARLY AND PEACEFUL
SETTLEMENT FO THESE DISPUTES AND MADE CLEAR THAT ANY
"ZONE OF PEACE" ARRANGEMENTS WOULD HAVE TO INCLUDE
CAMBODIA AND PRESUMABLY A SETTLEMENT OF THE CURRENT
VIETNAM-CAMBODIAN DISPUTE.

7. SRV-US RELATIONS WERE DEALT WITH ONLY IN PASSING,
IN TERMS SIMILAR TO HIEN'S PUBLIC STATEMENTS ELSEWHERE
DURING HIS TRIP. ACCORDING TO GOM OFFICIALS, THE
MALAYSIANS DID NOT PURSUE THE MATTER SINCE THEY
WISHED TO AVOID BEING CAST IN A MIDDLEMAN ROLE BETWEEN
THE US AND THE SRV.

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8. THE MALAYSIANS RAISED THE SUBJECT OF REFUGEES AND DESCRIBED THE BURDEN THIS HAS PLACED UPON THEM. HOWEVER, THEY APPARENTLY DID NOT PRESS THE SRV SPECIFICALLY TO TAKE MEASURES TO PREVENT REFUGEES FROM FLEEING. HIEN REPORTEDLY REPLIED WITH THE NO-FAMILIAR REFRAIN THAT "EVERY REVOLUTION HAS ITS MALCONTENTS, THESE ARE BAD ELEMENTS, AND OUR COASTLINE IS TOO LONG TO PATROL ANYHOW".

9. FOLLOWING HIEN'S DEPARTURE, THE MALAYSIAN REACTED VERY STRONGLY TO PRESS REPORTS FROM BANGKOK THAT HE HAD PROPOSED A NEW REGIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR SOUTHEAST ASIA WHILE HE WAS IN KUALA LUMPUR. CONFIDENTIAL

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A GOM SPOKESMAN EXPLICITLY DENIED THIS IN A STATEMENT RELEASED TO THE PRESS JULY 25. (THE SRV AMBASSADOR HERE CORNERED SEVERAL OF HIS DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES THE SAME EVENING TO DENY ALSO THAT HIEN HAD PROPOSED ANY SUCH ORGANIZATION.)

10. COMMENT: IN VARIOUS PUBLIC STATEMENTS DURING AND AFTER THE VISIT, GOM OFFICIALS WELCOMED THE SRV'S "POSITIVE" ATTITUDE TOWARD ZOPFAN AND TOWARD BETTER RELATIONS WITH ASEAN IN GENERAL. AND THEY MAY GENUINELY TAKE SOME PRIDE IN SEEING THEIR OWN EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SUCH RELATIONS BEGINNING TO PAY OFF. PRIVATELY, HOWEVER, THEY REMAIN QUITE WARY OF HANOI'S SUDDEN CHANGE OF HEART AND HIEN'S EFFORTS TO CURRY FAVOR IN THE REGION, AND THEY ARE WELL AWARE THAT THE SRV'S CURRENT PROBLEMS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS ARE A MORE LIKELY CAUSE THAN THEIR OWN ACTS OF GOODWILL. THE REPORT OF HIEN'S SUGGESTION OF A NEW ORGANIZATION FOR SEA PROBABLY REINFORCED THEIR SUSPICIONS OF HIEN'S EFFORTS DESPITE THE VIETNAMESE SUBSEQUENT DENIAL

11. THE MALAYSIANS CLEARLY DID NOT ALLOW HIEN TO PUSH THEM ALONG ANY FASTER THAN THEY WISHED TO GO OR IN A DIRECTION WHICH COULD PLACE THEM AT ODDS WITH THEIR ASEAN COLLEAGUES. THEY KNOW THAT HANOI SEES MALAYSIA AS PROBABLY THE MOST FORTHCOMING OF THE ASEAN IN TERMS OF IMPROVING SRV/ASEAN RELATIONS, AND THEY REALIZE THEY MUST BE CAREFUL TO AVOID THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY ARE BEING USED BY HANOI TO DIVIDE ASEAN. THEY ALSO HAVE THEIR RELATIONS WITH CHINA AND CAMBODIA TO CONSIDER. THUS THEIR CLEAR DETERMINATION TO KEEP DISCUSSIONS WITH THE VIETNAMESE TO A MEASURED PACE
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AND SCOPE RATHER THAN ACCEPTING HIEN'S PROPOSAL FOR HIGH-LEVEL DISCUSSIONS IN HANOI.

12. INTERMS OF SUBSTANCE, THERE IS ALSO SOME SUSPICION THAT THE DIFFERENCE IN WORDING OF A "ZONE OF PEACE" MAY BE MORE THAN JUST SEMANTICS, DESPITE HIEN'S IMPLICATION TO THE CONTRARY. A GOM-APPROVED KUALA LUMPUR RADIO COMMENTARY JULY 25 NOTED, WITHOUT FURTHER ELABORATION, THAT "THERE ARE CERTAIN DIFFERANCES IN THE CONCEPT THESE WORDS EMBODY". IT IS NOT CLEAR EXACTLY WHAT THE DIFFERENCES ARE, BUT ONE OBVIOUS PROBLEM WOULD BE THE DEFINITION OF "GENUINE NEHUTRALITY" AND/OR "GENUINE INDEPENDENCE" THE VIETNAMESE HAVE IN MIND.

13. IN FACT, ANOTHER REASON FOR THE MALASIAN DESIRE TO GO SLOW MAY WELL BE THAT THEY THEMSELVES PROBABLY DO NOT HAVE A VERY SPECIFIC IDEA YET OF WHAT THEIR OWN ZOPFAN PROPOSAL SHOULD CONTAIN IN SUBSTANTIVE TERMS. WE CAN RECALL A DISCUSSION OF ZOPFAN WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER DURING THE VISIT OF CODEL WOLFF LAST JANUARY IN WHICH THE FORMAL EXPLANATION OF THE PROPOSAL FROM ITS KEY PROPONENT NEVER GOT BEYOND VAGUE GENERALITIES. (THE QUESTION OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD CLEARLY BE AN IMPORTANT SPECIFIC ISSUE, TO INCLUDE CONSIDERATION FO NOT ONLY THE US BASES IN THE PHILIPPINES, BUT THE PRESENCE OF TOKEN NEW ZEALAND AND AUSTRALIAN FORCES IN MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE AS WELL.)

14. ALL IN ALL, HIEN'S VISIT HERE WOULD SEEM TO HAVE REINFORCED THE MALAYSIAN IN BOTH THEIR DEISRE TO PURSUE THEIR DIALOGUE WITH HANOI AND THEIR SUSPICIONS OF HANOI'S ACTUAL INTENTIONS AND SINCERITY AT THIS POIT. WE BELIEVE THEY WILL CONTINUE TO

PROCEED WITH CONSIDERABLE CAUTION.

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15. CONTRARY TO REFTTEL, PHAN HIEN DID NOT MEET
WITH FOREIGN MINISTER RITHAUDDEEN BECAUSE OF HIS
DELAYED ARRIVAL AND THE LATTER'S DEPARTURE FOR THE
NAM CONFERENCE IN BELGRADE.
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